

Building Foundations for Success: Relationship Skills

Whole Child Skill Development

Relationship Skills:

Relationship skills are necessary for effective communication, conflict management, and interacting with peers and others in various settings.

Relationship skills include the ability to:

- Communicate effectively
- Engage socially
- Establish and maintain positive relationships
- Collaborate and work well with others



Benefits of building relationship skills:

- Students and adults who are able to form positive relationships with others are less likely to experience mental illness such as anxiety and depression.¹ They are also less likely to engage in risky behaviors such as substance use.¹
- Relationship skills, including the ability to effectively communicate and cooperate with others, are essential to achieving stable employment.² According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (2020), even with increased usage of technology, relationship skills are valued and critical for post-secondary and professional success.
- Students who possess relationship skills perform better academically³ and are less likely to engage in aggressive behaviors such as bullying.⁴
- Students and adults with the ability to collaborate and work effectively with others are better able to engage in collaborative problem solving to solve complex challenges that effect groups and communities.⁵

Whole Child Skill Development : Developing whole child skills, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and the ability to make responsible decisions, are essential to student success inside and outside of the classroom. For more information, check out the OPI's [Whole Child Supports](#) website and the [Montana Whole Child Skill Development Competencies](#).

Classroom Strategies for Building Student Relationship Skills:

Educators are very likely already implementing strategies that build relationship skills in students. The strategies below are provided for consideration and were selected by a work-group of Montana educators and child development experts as strategies that are strength-based and correspond with the [Montana Whole Child Skill Development Competencies](#). We encourage all strategies to be selected based on ease of implementation into existing curriculum, school practices, and student and educator preference.

Grade K-2:

- Ask students to find a partner in the classroom and engage in a conversation to find three things they have in common and three things that are different. Practice taking turns listening and speaking.
- Use age appropriate literature for teaching students friendship and relationship skills.

Grade 3-5:

- In groups, have students build structures using only the materials provided (or some other problem-solving task). Later, ask the students to discuss how they cooperated as a group to solve the challenge.

Grade 6-8:

- Have students perform different roles in cooperative learning groups (i.e. [facilitator](#), [recorder](#), [reporter](#), [time-keeper](#)) to develop and practice communication skills.
- Provide students opportunities to practice [positive peer support](#) through class meetings, small groups, and school-sponsored activities.
- Have students review social media posts and discuss how those posts impact relationships positively and negatively.

Grade 9-12:

- Have students draw their [personal “people” web of support](#). Next to each person’s name, write one strategy they could use to maintain that supportive relationship.
- Create mentorship opportunities for students to welcome new students and in-coming freshmen students.

School-wide Strategies for Building Relationship Skills:

- Use [restorative circles](#) to build community within the school for all students and staff.
- Establish an atmosphere of friendship by encouraging friendly greetings between students and staff, students and their peers, and between staff; encourage using the name of the person being greeted.
- Promote “tech fasts” where everyone in the building takes a break from the use of technology for a period of time and instead focuses on interacting with others through games, telling stories, and other activities.
- Establish class or [morning meetings](#) across all grade-levels and staff meetings that provide students and staff the opportunity to interact with each other and practice speaking and listening skills.
- As part of a school’s school-wide expectations, teach students and adults problem-solving and [conflict resolution skills](#), and provide support as needed when they are working to resolve a conflict.

Strategies for Building Relationship Skills in School Staff:

- Create mentorship opportunities for new educators and school staff whenever someone is hired or obtains a new position.

Check out the [Montana Standards Association Framework](#) to learn more about Whole Child Skill Development Competencies and their alignment with other Montana academic standards.